DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 269 898 EA 018 509

AUTHOR Wimpelberg, Robert K.
TITLE Bureaucratic and Cultural Images in the Management of More and Less Effective Schools.
SPONS AGENCY Southeastern Regional Council for Educational Improvement, Research Triangle Park, N.C.
PUB DATE Apr 86
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (70th, San Francisco, CA, April 16-20, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Administrative Organization; Administrator Characteristics; *Administrator Role; Bureaucracy; Elementary Secondary Education; Instructional Leadership; *Leadership Styles; *Principals; *School Effectiveness; *School Supervision; Supervisory Methods; Teacher Administrator Relationship
IDENTIFIERS Louisiana; Louisiana Basic Skills Test

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a research study designed, in part, to explore the expression of bureaucracy (or structural management) and culture (or symbolic management) in the work of eighteen elementary school principals in Louisiana. In addition, the study compares principals in nine of the schools categorized as "more effective" and nine categorized as "less effective," based on mean scores on the reading section of the Louisiana Basic Skills Test (LBST). Findings disclose an apparent reliance on bureaucratic procedures and externally defined purposes, and a sensitivity to adult (political) influences in the less effective schools. This contrasts with a use of process and symbols, a broad and internally forged definition of purpose, and a "child-as-client" orientation in the more effective schools. References are included. (TE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Robert K. Wimpelberg

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED269898

BUREAUCRATIC AND CULTURAL IMAGES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF MORE AND LESS EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

Robert K. Wimpelberg

Department of Educational Leadership
and Foundations

University of New Orleans
New Orleans, Louisiana 70148

April 1986

EA 018 589

Prepared for the Annual Meeting of the
American Educational Research Association
San Francisco

The research reported in this paper was partially underwritten by the Southeastern Council for Educational Improvement

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

BUREAUCRATIC AND CULTURAL IMAGES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF MORE AND LESS EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

After Weber (1971) and others began to successfully refute the conclusions attributed to Coleman et al. (1966) and Jencks et al. (1972)--that "schools do not make a difference"--research on effective schools developed a tacit consensus about the characteristics of effectiveness. For one thing, a principal who exhibits "leadership" appeared to be present in each effective school and that principal appeared to monitor achievement and instruction in a close manner. The latter behavior coupled with a noticeably clear sense of "goals" lead Cohen (1981) to observe that the classic bureaucratic kind of management might be a common ingredient in effective schools.

In addition to close monitoring and goal clarity, researchers of effective schools have documented a qualitatively different set of characteristics, including a sense of "mission" and the presence of high "expectations" (Clark et al., 1985). These facets, in contrast with goal clarity, output monitoring, and instructional supervision, are more "symbolic" or "cultural" in quality (see Bolman & Deal, 1984). "Mission" and "expectations" are not predisposed to procedural specificity or predictability. Instead, they capture the personality and belief systems of the people and their organization and, as such, form a more ethereal dimension of the school.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Using the terms "bureaucratic" and "cultural," Firestone and Wilson (1985) described both aspects of school leadership as distinctive sets of linkages available to the school principal who would attempt to improve school processes and outcomes. This paper reports on a research study designed, in part, to explore the expression of bureaucracy (or structural management) and culture (or symbolic management) in the work of elementary school principals. In addition, the study compares principals in schools categorized as "more effective" and "less effective." What emerges are an apparent reliance on bureaucratic procedures, externally defined purposes, and a sensitivity to adult (political) forces in the less effective schools. This contrasts with a use of process and symbols, a broad and internally forged definition of purpose, and a "child-as-client" orientation in the more effective schools.

The Study and Methodology

The Sample

The data reported in this paper come from a component of Phase III of the Louisiana School Effectiveness Study, a research effort organized by the Louisiana State Department of Education in collaboration with university faculty and graduate students. Phase I was a pilot study and Phase II was a macro-level study of 76 schools with third grade classrooms, consisting primarily of the collection and analyses of quantitative data (see Teddlie et al., 1985).

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Phase III was designed to incorporate a classroom-level teacher effectiveness study within a general school effectiveness study and to develop a set of case studies. In Phase III (1984-85) eighteen schools--nine pairs of "more effective" and "less effective" schools--were chosen from a study population of 345 schools in the twelve districts that had participated in Phase II; to this population was added a large urban district. The eighteen schools in Phase III were geographically and economically representative of the Louisiana population.

The criteria for "more" and "less" effectiveness came from a parish-by-parish analysis of mean scores on the reading section of the Louisiana Basic Skills Test (LBST) and socioeconomic (SES) data, including mother's education level, father's occupational prestige, and the racial composition of the student body. Seven regression models were developed in which the SES data were used as independent variables in predicting LBST mean reading scores for all third graders in each school. Predicted mean scores were subtracted from actual mean scores, and the residuals were used in making judgments about school effectiveness for the inclusion of schools in the study sample.

To be a candidate for inclusion in the final set of more effective and less effective pairs, a school had to have scored above or below its predicted mean for both the 1982-83 and 1983-84 school years or substantially above or below for a single year. Further, each school had to have a

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

match within the same district whose SES data were similar to the first school and whose test residuals carried an opposite sign (+ or -). Within these criteria, the final sample was constrained to included three pairs from rural, three from small city or suburban, and three from urban areas. The pairs were to be distributed in northern, central, and southern regions of the state, and had to include a variety of minority, majority, and mixed student populations.

Among the original eighteen schools, two were excluded when the researchers found that the third grade classrooms were atypical for the school. From the remaining sixteen schools, principals in four schools were not interviewed at the time the data were analyzed for this paper. Thus, the set of principals whose interviews are reported here numbers twelve: six in less effective schools matched with six in more effective schools. Six of the principals were women, and six were men. The author conducted all interviews and recorded responses as selective verbatim.

Organization of the Interview Protocol

The interview for principals was organized around eight topics, each of which was presented in the form of a statement to which the principals chose a Likert-style response, after which the interviewer invited open commentary, asked clarifying questions, and probed the meaning of the principal's responses. Among the eight topics, five are germane to issues discussed in this paper.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Those five were captured in the following Likert-style statements:

1. When people think about my school, it stands for something special.

2. I am able to monitor classroom instruction very closely.

3. The most important criterion I use for evaluating the effectiveness of my teachers is how well they teach reading and math.

4. I have a lot of latitude in deciding which teachers to hire and keep.

5. The factor that has the strongest effect on how much our students learn is their family background.

Principals chose a position on a traditional 5-position scale, from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The interview began as each principal discussed his or her response the the Likert item, prompted by the interviewer's instruction, "Tell me about your answer." Additional follow-up for each Likert-style item was standardized around specific "probes," numbering as few as four and as many as seven depending on the item.

The Likert-style items were used to determine if a single, simple statement about an issue would distinguish between the more effective and less effective schools. Open ended follow-up questions and probes were used to elicit the meaning, images, and personal understanding that the principals would bring to the issues.

Interviews were done, with one exception, at the school site during the spring and summer of 1985. They lasted

between 55 and 135 minutes with the average interview taking about 90 minutes.

Mission, Instruction, and Family Background

Responses to the Likert-style statements do not distinguish between principals in more effective and less effective schools on four of the five topics. Only the statement about family background and its effect on student achievement generated some divergence between the two groups. Table 1 displays the Likert results. On all topics, however, there are notable differences in the follow-up responses that principals gave during the interviews.

Insert Table 1 about here.

Mission: "What my school stands for."

On the issue of school mission the less effective and more effective schools differed primarily in the degree to which children were central to the school's purpose, and they differed in the nature of their orientation toward children. Principals in the less effective schools tended to have parent needs or value systems in mind when they thought about what their school "stands for". In two schools, principals discussed their before- and after-school programs and health services that parents weren't able to

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

provide as the primary identity of the school. In two other schools, traditional behavioral or moral values came first to principals' mind. In one case, it was "Christian values" that the principal cited and in the other case, the school was reported to teach that "good manners are never going out of style."

In the more effective schools, principals described the mission of the school as providing a "refuge for kids in a world of chaos," "a home (as opposed to jail) for poor kids," a "positive climate--without belittlement," "a place where kids are taken care of with self respect," a "place for high expectations and positive discipline," and "enrichment" for children.

The generalizable difference between the groups is the centrality of children in their mission. The less effective schools tended to have adult needs or value systems in mind. In the more effective schools, principals responded as though they "saw" the children first: school was a "home," "refuge," a place for being "taken care of." Even the principals who discussed behavioral systems stressed self-respect and a positive orientation, both of which involve special consideration of the children's needs.

Monitoring Classroom Instruction

No difference between the less effective and more effective schools emerged in the Likert item that stated: "I am able to monitor classroom instruction very closely." Even in the frequency reporting during one of the follow-up

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

probes principals in all twelve schools looked remarkably alike. Most said they combined formal and informal observations, going into each classroom about once a week. Most complained that they had too little time to carry out "clinical supervision."

The groups differed, however, in the flavor with which principals described their involvement in the classroom. In less effective schools, principals painted pictures that were somewhat distant from the classroom. Two principals cited district evaluation policy when giving details of the monitoring process; another stressed the reading of report card grades and comments as monitoring behavior; a fourth noted that she had the teachers come to her office for conferences every couple weeks. One principal felt she had the luxury of an in-house curriculum coordinator who did the close work with teachers.

In the more effective schools, principals tended to focus on classrooms and worked to make them open. Two principals talked about their efforts to make children and teachers comfortable with observation; another claimed to do a considerable number of demonstration lessons. One principal said she read teachers' lesson plans on a daily basis in order to inform herself for her daily walks through the halls.

The essential difference between groups on the monitoring of classroom behavior has to do with the distance principals report, not from classrooms per se, but from

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

classroom processes. Making classrooms open and observable, doing demonstration lessons, and checking daily lesson plans offer some contrast to making observations according to district evaluation policies, reading report cards, and meeting with teachers in the principal's office.

Hiring and Firing

When asked if they had much control over hiring and retaining teachers, principals in the less effective and more effective schools reported similar levels of authority but differed in how they exercised them. In general, principals in less effective schools followed procedures, while principals in more effective schools took assertive .

In less effective schools principals claimed to have considerable control over hiring, yet their descriptions of process were, to a person, descriptive of bureaucratic approaches. One said the director of personnel operates as a "dictator" and puts teachers in place. Three others gave details about the hiring procedures--how the announcement of a vacancy is made, how central office sends candidates for interviews and a tour of the school, and how the principal chooses from among those sent out. In one school the principal claimed that she could make a case for special privileges, because of knowing a board member well, but she reported that she chose to operate "by the rules."

Two principals in more effective schools reported "using" or "playing" the system to get the teachers they needed. One of these principals had a newly integrated

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

school that was attempting to stabilize its white population; another had children from exceptionally very poor, single parent families. In both cases, the principals reported that they used their schools' characteristics to make special claims for personnel needs. Another principal said she virtually "lived" in the personnel office whenever she had an opening. And a fourth said that the personnel office turned to the principal for interactive consultation each time there was an opening to be filled; here, both central office and the school worked together to make the best match of teacher and school setting. These behaviors are similar to the "take charge" characteristic that Blumberg and Greenfield (1980) attributed to the effective principals in their study.

Basic Skills

The final curricular/instructional issue that distinguished less effective from more effective schools is the primacy of instruction in reading and mathematics. When responding to the statement, "The most important criterion I use for evaluating the effectiveness of my teachers is how well they teach reading and math," all respondents generally agreed that "the basics" were important. It was in their qualifications on such a response and their descriptions of rival criteria that caused divergence between the less effective and more effective groups.

In less effective schools, two principals said that reading and math were unequivocally the most important,

although one added the criterion of "teaching children on their level." A second principal said that everything in the state curriculum bulletin (including reading and math) guided judgments of quality in teaching. A third principal reported that "classroom control is most important, and [the students'] getting along with others." Two others said that teaching humanistically and "teaching children respect" were of equal importance to teaching reading and math.

In more effective schools, principals described reading and math as service skills for higher order learning; in the words of one principal, "they're fundamental, of course, but there's much more." One said, "Reading serves learning, and it's important only in that way." In a similar spirit, citing a student with high test scores but faulty application skills, a principal said, "It's the transfer that's important." Another cited problem solving, inference, and enthusiasm for learning as symptoms of good teaching--more than simple emphasis on reading and math. Finally, a principal who encourages lots of creative writing from the earliest grades onward, said "Our babies must start thinking."

The Importance of Family Background

The responses on "mission" are reinforced by the principals' judgments about the effect of family background on children's achievement. In four of the six less effective schools, principals agreed that family background is the primary determinant of achievement; one of these four

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"strongly agreed" with the Likert statement. In four of the six more effective schools, principals disagreed with the statement (see Table 1).

In the less effective schools principals catalogued reasons to substantiate the dominant effect of home environment. Time and caring appeared most important. Children, one principals noted, "spend more time in the projects." Another said, "You try to put your values on these kids but they don't fit." In a mixed SES school, the principal complained that "the non-affluent families simply lack concern, and we have a hard time overcoming that." One of the principals in an less effective school who <u>denied</u> the primacy of family background in achievement outcomes noted that she had an extended day with before- and after-school care, and her teaching staff, therefore, had more time than the parents to influence children's attitudes and learning.

In the more effective schools, principals tended to accept differences among parents and attempted, in some cases, to modify parental behavior rather than complain about it. "We let parents know they have a role," said one principal. "I work on parents' aspirations and discipline at home," said another; "I ask for parents help in checking homework." Others accepted the family situations they inherited and turned inward: "Many pitiful kids have done well because of teachers and counselors; family expectations are important but not as important as the school's." One principal summed up her attitudes as follows:

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

> Experience tells me that kids can do well inspite of their background. [Home situations] do make a school work harder sometimes. We consider high socioeconomic status and involved parents are langiappe [a benefit not anticipated].

Images of Schools and School Effectiveness

More Effective Schools

The work center of the more effective school is the classroom, and at the heart of things are children. Although principals in the more effective schools did not necessarily visit classrooms more often than their counterparts in less effective schools, they talked in a more intimate way about classroom life and about making it public. Classrooms should be used to visitors, and lesson plans should match what is taught. "Production" outcomes in classrooms in more effective schools were conceived in broad terms. Although principals in these schools all affirmed the fundamental importance of skill training in reading and math, they valued its "transfer" the most. For example, reading should "serve learning." Problem solving, inference, enthusiasm for learning , and helping children learn "to think" were primary criteria in the evaluation of teaching.

Critical to this vision of what classroom life should produce are the qualities of classroom teachers, and principals in more effective schools seemed to leave little to chance. Some used their schools' characteristics to claim first rights to teacher applicants, and others made

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

sure they knew the full array of choices available in the personnel registry.

The centrality of the classroom, and the importance of hand-picking teachers from the largest possible pool are set in a child-oriented mission for the school. Principals at more effective sites pictured their schools as "refuge" and "home" for children who are otherwise used to chaos or alienation. They stressed "positive climate," "high expectations," and "positive discipline" as trademarks. What stands out in these images is the importance of the needs and place of children in them, and the frequent use of the word "positive."

Less Effective Schools

In less effective schools principals made more frequent references to organizational procedures and routines and described activities and characteristics that were motivated, to a considerable extent, by adult needs. Rather than describing how they got to know and understand classroom processes or how they took the initiative in replacing teachers with the best available candidates, principals in less effective schools tended to cite policy formulations; they offered the sequence of events that constituted their district's teacher evaluation plans and the standard routines that made up their personnel placement procedures. The principal's role in both examples is reactive.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

To a considerable degree, principals in the less effective schools had a "flatter" sense of what teaching should produce. More often than their counterparts who had children from similar backgrounds, they stressed the singular importance of reading and math skills. Those who elaborated on performance criteria tended not to cite more complex cognitive or academic expectations but, instead, issues of behavioral control.

The matter of proper behavior also appears in the principals' statements of mission in a couple less effective schools; one person said his school stood, first and foremost, for Christian values, and another talked about "good manners." In both cases the principals complained about the extent to which they had to overcome the debilitating effects of parental attitudes. In two other less effective schools principals presented the role of the school in similar terms, functioning in a nearly literal version of "in loco parentis." These schools either offered medical and dental treatment that families could not or would not afford or had day care for single parent and dual-working-parent families. In four of six schools, then, the institutional raison d'etre, according to the principals, was to compensate for inadequate parents. This stands in contrast to the purpose of serving the development of children--a more common theme in the more effective schools.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Bureaucracy and Culture

The comparative frequency in references to standard procedures and the qualitative differences between school missions and attitudes toward parents are reminiscent of the duality of bureaucracy and culture framed by a variety of current students of management and organizations. Some scholars, like Peters and Waterman (1982) see the bureaucratic approach--or in their terms, "the rationalistic" approach--and the cultural one as competing and virtually antithetical. This is similar to the Bolman and Deal (1985) presentation of four managerial approaches (they discuss the "human resources" and "political" approaches, as well). Bolman and Deal assert that a given manager has a single, dominant view of the organization that colors his or her attitudes and instructs decision making. The person's dominant managerial frame, futhermore, is based on a set of fundamental, paradigmatic assumptions that are qualitatively different from the assumptions that shape alternative approaches to management. Using the "competing approaches" formulation we speculate that principals in less effective schools rely more on structural, rationalistic, or bureaucratic orientations in which organizational goals are viewed in fairly concrete terms and "standard operating procedures" are granted strong legitimacy. Consistent with this managerial approach, lower-level cognitive skills and behavioral management training for children become the primary organizational goals, and the favored methods of

 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

management are cast as school and district rules and policies. Principals in more effective schools can be viewed as symbolic (Bolman and Deal's term, 1984) or cultural managers for whom meaning takes precedence over production, and both the goals and technical processes for achieving them are accepted as ambiguous and personalistic. Thus, principals in more effective schools involve themselves in classroom processes rather than evaluation procedures, and they talk in global ways about institutional missions. Like Peters and Waterman's (1982) managers, principals in more effective schools had a "bias for action" and tended to stay "close to the customer"--defining "customer" in this context as <u>the child</u>.

Firestone and Wilson (1985) use the bureaucratic and cultural paradigms in a manner that allows their simultaneous application. Principals, they assert, have both bureaucratic and cultural "linkages" at their disposal, and principals may use both sets in order to give positive direction (leadership) to a school. Our 90 minutes of interview data place limitations on a full test of this interpretive approach. Nevertheless, we can find examples of instrumental bureaucracy among principals in more effective schools when they describe their routines for observing classrooms and checking lesson plans. Similarly, we can use the terms "symbolic" or "cultural" management to label the sense of distance these principals appear to keep from classroom processes and the school lives of children.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

We may even enlist the Bolman and Deal (1984) concept of "political management" to describe principals in both kinds of schools. For Bolman and Deal, the political manager assumes that organizational life is characterized by "win-loose" interactions in which organizational goals and decision processes are the result of bargaining and negotiation among competitors inside and outside the organization; bargaining predominates because the most basic organizational issues revolve around the allocation of scarce resources. Principals in less effective schools can be characterized as operating politically if we view their reliance on standard operating procedures as self-protective behavior (rather than goal-accomplishing effort). Principals in more effective schools behave politically when they actively vie for the best teachers on the assumption that quality is a scarce commodity; if they don't "win" some degree of it, they will loose it to their rival colleagues.

Allowing for the simultaneous application of management paradigms is somewhat unsatisfying if, in the end, we cannot draw distinctions between the more and less effective schools. This, I believe, we can do by viewing the paradigms as analytically neutral models, each of which has its positive and negative dimensions (see Wimpelberg et al., 1985). Such a formulation is similar to Reddin's (1967) expansion of the Blake and Mouton leadership grid into "analytical" (neutral), "effective," and an "ineffective" models.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

If both sets of principals in this study can be thought of as bureaucratic, political, and cultural managers, the principals in less effective schools may be characterized as being overly restrictive in their use of structure, overly defensive in their approach to the political, and dysfunctional in the way they generated organizational culture. Principals in the more effective schools may be more selective in their use of structural management, motivated most by the development of children when they behaved "politically," and ultimately child-centered and optimistic in the cultural mission they undertook for their school.

Conclusion

This formulation is self-consciously speculative, on the one hand, and bound by the imagery of a single person in each school, on the other. It does not take into account, for example, the make up or role of the teaching staffs in the twelve schools or the relationship of the school to its regional community or central district office. The comprehensive analysis of qualitative and quantitative data from student through central office levels remains to be undertaken in Phase III of the Louisiana School Effectiveness Study. Nevertheless, to the extent that we explore the critical importance of the school principal in school effectiveness and the role of "vision" in school leadership, the analysis of images according to managerial

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

paradigms adds richness to our understanding of "schools that work."

References

Blumberg, A. & Greenfield, W. (1980). The effective principal: perspectives on school leadership. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Bolman, L. & Deal, T. (1984). Modern approaches to understanding and managing organizations. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Cohen, M. (1981). Effective schools: What the research says. Today's Education (April/May):38G-41G.

Coleman, J., Campbell, E., Hobson, C., Partland, J., Mood, A., Weinfield, F., & York, R. (1966). Equality of educational opportunity. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Firestone, W., & Wilson, B. (1985). Using bureaucratic and cultural linkages to improve instruction: The principal's contribution. Educational Administration Quarterly, 21 (Spring): 7-30.

Jencks, C., Smith, M., Ackland, H., Bane, M., Cohen, D., Gintis, H., Hynes, B., & Michaelson, S. (1972). Inequality: a reassessment of the effects of family and schooling in America. New York: Basic Books.

Peters, T. & Waterman, R. (1982). In search of excellence: Lessons from America's best run companies. New York: Harper & Row.

Reddin, W. (1967). The 3-D management style theory. Training and Development Journal (April):8-17.

Teddlie, C.; Stringfield, S., & Desselle, S. (1985). Methods, history, selected findings, and recommendations from the Louisiana School Effectiveness Study, 1980-85. Journal of Classroom Interaction, 20 (2): 22-29.

Weber, G. (1971). Inner-city children can be taught to read: four successful schools. Occasional paper, number eighteen. Washington, D.C.: Council for Basic Education.

Wimpelberg, R., Abroms, K., & Catardi, C. (1985). Multiple models for administrator preparation in early childhood special education. Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 5 (1):1-14.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Table 1

Responses of Principals Grouped by
More Effective (ME) and Less Effective (LE) Schools
to Five Likert-Style Items

ITEM		RESPONSES: Agree or Strongly Agree	Not Sure	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
1. When people think about my school, it stands for something special.	ME	6		
	LE	6		
2. I am able to monitor classroom instruction very closely.	ME	6		
	LE	6		
3. The most important criterion I use for evaluating the effectiveness of my teachers is how well they teach reading and math.	ME	5		1
	LE	4	1	1
4. I have a lot of latitude in deciding which teachers to hire and keep.	ME	5		1
	LE	4	1	1
5. The factor that has the strongest effect on how much our students learn is their family background.	ME	2		4
	LE	4		2

BEST COPY AVAILABLE